

SPORT FISHING

Emergency Order

ALASKA DEPARTMENT
OF FISH & GAME

Under Authority of AS 16.05.060

Emergency Order No. 2-KS-2-08-20

Issued at: Palmer, Wednesday, February 26, 2020

Effective Date: 6:00 a.m. Friday, May 1, 2020

Expiration Date: 11:59 p.m. Monday, July 13, 2020,
unless superseded by subsequent emergency order.

EXPLANATION:

This emergency order closes Unit 2 of the Susitna River to sport fishing for king salmon and restricts sport fishing for king salmon in the remainder of the Susitna River drainage to catch-and-release. Areas outside of Unit 2 of the Susitna River open to catch-and-release fishing include waters normally open to king salmon fishing by regulation such as lower minor tributaries within Unit 1 of the Susitna River and the Deshka River, Yentna River (Unit 4), Talkeetna River (Unit 5), Chulitna River (Unit 6), and Upper Susitna River (Unit 3). In addition, sport fishing gear is limited to one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure in all waters of the Susitna River drainage. A single-hook is defined as a hook with only one point.

Fishing for other finfish species remains open. In the waters of Unit 2 normally open to king salmon fishing, fishing for trout and other species is allowed seven days per week. King salmon may not be targeted and those caught while fishing for other species may not be removed from the water and must be released immediately. The area affected by this emergency order includes all waters open to king salmon fishing in Units 1- 6 of the Susitna River drainage.

REGULATION:

The provisions of 5 AAC 61.110. (1)(A) and (B)(i), 5 AAC 61.112. (1), (4), (6)(A) and (B), 5 AAC 61.114. (1) and (3), 5 AAC 61.116. (2), 5 AAC 61.118. (1), (4), and (7)(A), 5 AAC 61.120. (1), and 5 AAC 61.122. (1) and (4)(A) are superseded by this emergency order. Under this emergency order, the following provisions are effective, beginning 6:00 a.m. Friday, May 1 through 11:59 p.m. Monday, July 13, 2020:

5 AAC 61.110. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and methods and means for the Susitna River Drainage Area.

- (1) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

5 AAC 61.112. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 1 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.

- (1) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;
- (4) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;
- (6) in the Deshka River drainage, including Trapper Lake,
 - (A) in flowing waters upstream of the Moose/Kroto Creeks, only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;
 - (B) from its mouth upstream to ADF&G regulatory markers located 300 feet downstream of the weir (river mile 7), and in all waters within a one-half mile radius of its confluence with

the Susitna River; king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

(C) from its mouth upstream to ADF&G regulatory markers near Chijuk Creek (river mile 17), and in all waters within a one-half mile radius of its confluence with the Susitna River, only one, unbaited, single hook, artificial lure may be used;

(D) the remainder of the drainage is closed to sport fishing for king salmon;

5 AAC 61.114. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 2 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.

(1) from May 1 - July 13, Unit 2 is open to sport fishing for all finfish species, except king salmon; sport fishing for king salmon is closed;

(3) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(15) from May 1 - July 13, sport fishing for any finfish species is not allowed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

5 AAC 61.116. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 3 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.

(2) from May 1 - July 13, king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish; sport fishing for any finfish species is not allowed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

5 AAC 61.118. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 4 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.

(1) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(2) from May 1 - July 13, sport fishing is not allowed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

(4) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

(6) in the Fish Lake Creek drainage,

(A) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

(7) in the Lake Creek drainage,

(A) from an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately 100 yards upstream of its mouth to an ADF&G regulatory marker located approximately one-quarter mile upstream of Bulchitna Lake, only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(C) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

5 AAC 61.120. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 5 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.

(1) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;

(2) from May 1 – July 13, sport fishing is not allowed from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.;

(3) in the Clear (Chunilna) Creek drainage;

(B) king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

5AAC 61.122. Special provisions for the seasons, bag, possession, and size limits, and methods and means for Unit 6 of the Susitna River Drainage Area.

- (1) in flowing waters only one unbaited, single-hook, artificial lure may be used;
- (4) in the East Fork of the Chulitna River drainage, including all waters within a one-quarter mile radius of its confluence of the East Fork and West Fork and including the Middle Fork of the Chulitna and the first quarter mile of Honolulu Creek,
 - (A) the waters are open to sport fishing for all finfish species, including king salmon; king salmon may not be retained or possessed; king salmon caught must be released immediately; a person may not remove a king salmon from the water before releasing the fish;

Doug Vincent-Lang,
Commissioner

By delegation to:

Sam Ivey,
Area Management Biologist

JUSTIFICATION:

The Susitna River and other king salmon stocks throughout Cook Inlet are experiencing a period of low productivity. Below average escapements have resulted in preseason and inseason restrictions and closures on the Deshka, Eastside, Talkeetna, and Yentna king salmon stocks and other isolated streams since 2012.

The preseason forecast for Deshka River king salmon is for a total run of 10,570 king salmon, with an 80% prediction interval of 1,860 - 19,280 fish. Given a Biological Escapement Goal (BEG) of 9,000 - 18,000 fish and ability to adjust management actions during the season using weir counts, allowing catch-and-release fishing opportunity from the outset of the season is warranted. Mortality due to catch-and-release fishing and harvest of this stock in commercial and subsistence fisheries is not expected to reduce escapement below the lower end of the BEG based on the point estimate of the forecast.

Modeled escapement of the Yentna River king salmon stock is based on post season aerial index counts of spawners on three major and five minor streams of the Yentna River drainage (Unit 4 of the Susitna River). Escapement of the Yentna River king salmon stock in 2019 of 22,900 fish showed a marked increase over 2017-2018 escapement levels and indicate an upward trend. Even still, a cautionary approach is warranted given escapements in 2017 and 2018 were near the lower end of the Optimal Escapement Goal (OEG) of 16,000 - 22,000 king salmon. Mortality due to catch-and-release fishing is not expected to reduce escapement below the lower end of the OEG if abundance is comparable to 2019.

Modeled escapement of the Talkeetna River king salmon stock is based on post season aerial index counts of spawners on two major streams of the Talkeetna River drainage (Unit 5 of the Susitna River). Escapement of the Talkeetna River king salmon stock in 2019 of 10,800 showed improvement over 2017-2018 escapement levels and an upward trend has been experienced over the past three years. Even still, a cautionary approach is warranted given escapements in 2017 and 2018 were near the lower end of the Sustainable Escapement Goal (SEG) of 9,000 - 17,500 king salmon. Mortality due to catch-and-release fishing is not expected to reduce escapement below the lower end of the SEG if abundance is comparable to 2019.

The East Fork Chulitna River (Unit 6) SEG was achieved in 2019 and indexed escapement in Portage Creek of the upper Susitna River (Unit 3) was above the recent 10-year average. These remote areas of the Susitna drainage receive minor effort; mortality due to catch-and-release fishing is negligible.

The department monitors escapement on eight streams comprising the Eastside king salmon stock (Unit 2 of the Susitna River). King salmon abundance in this area of the Susitna River drainage has remained chronically low, even in 2019 when other Susitna River stocks showed increases in abundance over past years. There is no indication the Eastside stock SEG of 13,000 - 25,000 fish may be met in 2020 and therefore king salmon fishing should not be allowed in this area.

Prohibiting retention of king salmon in the majority of the Susitna River drainage is expected to provide sport fishing opportunity and still achieve escapement goals during 2020. Below average runs during previous years, past performance of fisheries within the Susitna River drainage under previous years' management strategies, and uncertainty over how returns may recover in the future justify starting the 2020 season with these restrictions. Data gathered from weirs, fishwheels, boat surveys, and aerial surveys will be used to gauge run strength during the season.

DISTRIBUTION:

The distribution list for this emergency order is on file at the Region II Office of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Sport Fish, 333 Raspberry Road, Anchorage, AK 99518, (907) 267-2218.